



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**David Gordon/Pickup Company records**

1957-2017 [bulk 1976-2012]

(S) \*MGZMD 480

Processed by Heather Lember in 2018.

## Summary

**Creator:** Gordon, David, 1936-

**Title:** David Gordon/Pickup Company records

**Date:** 1957-2017 [bulk 1976-2012]

**Size:** 34.75 linear feet (82 boxes); 2.8 megabytes (56 computer files)

**Source:** Donated by David Gordon, 2017.

**Abstract:** David Gordon is a choreographer, dancer, and founder of the Pickup Performance Company. Gordon's papers date from 1957 to 2017, and chronicle his dance career through photographs, programs, press clippings, flyers, and administrative files.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

### Conditions Governing Access:

Electronic records are currently unavailable.

**Preferred citation:** David Gordon/Pickup Company records, (S) \*MGZMD 480. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Heather Lember in 2018.

### Separated Materials:

Videos of performances have been individually cataloged as the "David Gordon archive" and are available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

## Creator History

David Gordon is a New York City-based choreographer, director, writer, and dancer known for his postmodern dance performances.

Gordon was born in New York City in 1936, and raised on Manhattan's Lower East Side and Brooklyn's Coney Island neighborhood. After graduating from Seward Park High School, Gordon attended Brooklyn College, where he studied art and first developed an interest in dance. Gordon joined the school's modern dance club, and subsequently landed the lead role in the college's production of *Dark of the Moon*.

In 1958, after graduating from Brooklyn College, Gordon began dancing with the choreographer James Waring's company. Through his work with Waring, Gordon met the dancer Valda Setterfield, who had recently moved to New York City from England. Gordon choreographed his first duet with Setterfield, *Mama Goes Where Papa Goes*, in 1960. The following year Gordon and Setterfield were married, and in 1962, their son Ain was born. In order to help financially support the family, Gordon took a series of jobs designing window displays for retail stores and doing photography layout for magazines.

In 1962, Gordon assisted in founding the Judson Dance Theater, which hosted performances at the Judson Church. Some of Gordon's early works included *Mannequin Dance* (1962), *Helen's Dance* (1962), *Random Breakfast* (1963), and *Silver Pieces (Fragments)* (1964). However, a poorly received 1966 solo performance of *Walks and Digressions* so discouraged Gordon, he did not choreograph another dance for five years.

Gordon joined Yvonne Rainer's dance company in 1966, a collaboration that led to the formation of the Grand Union dance group in 1970. In addition to Gordon and Rainer, the group comprised the dancers Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, Nancy Lewis, and Steve Paxton. The group performed improvisational pieces together until 1976.

In 1971, Gordon formed the Pickup Performance Company to promote his own work. The company incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1976, and put on such performances as *Sleepwalking* (1971), *The Matter* (1972), *Chair* (1974), *Times Four* (1975), *Personal Inventory* (1976), *Wordsworth and the Motor* (1977), *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives* (1977), *What Happened* (1978), *An Audience With the Pope (or This Is Where I Came In)* (1979), and *Close Up* (1979).

With the increasing success of his dance career, Gordon was able to give up his window display and design work, focusing full time on the Pickup Company and taking their productions on the road. The company toured the United States with, *Close Up*, *Dorothy and Eileen* (1980), *T.V. Reel* (1982), *Trying Times* (1982), *Framework* (1983), *My Folks* (1984), *Four Men Nine Lives* (1985), and *Transparent Means for Travelling Light* (1986).

Between 1985 and 1986, Gordon produced two performances for the American Ballet Theatre, *Field, Chair and Mountain* (1985) and *Murder* (1986). The latter was adapted into the television program, *David Gordon's Made in U.S.A.*, which was part of the *Dance in America* series commissioned by WNET and *Great Performances* in 1987, and which earned Gordon an Emmy Award.

In 1987, Gordon began work on an ambitious project called *United States*, in which he crafted productions unique to particular locations around the country. Gordon conducted extensive research, soliciting information about specific venues and cities, and enlisting over thirty regional co-presenters. This culminated in two years of touring that brought Gordon and his dancers to sixteen states, as well

as Washington, D.C and Brazil.

In 1991, Gordon wrote, directed, and choreographed, *The Mysteries and What's So Funny*, a piece that featured Setterfield in the role of Marcel Duchamp, and included music by Philip Glass. The work garnered both a Bessie and an Obie award for Gordon. This was followed up with another Obie Award winning piece, *The Family Business* (1994), a collaboration with Gordon's son. That same year, Gordon directed and choreographed the musical, *Shlemiel the First*, which won Drama-Logue Awards for both direction and choreography.

Gordon was awarded the National Theatre Artist Residency Grant in 1995, and worked with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis to direct and choreograph Max Frisch's *The Firebugs*. This was followed by additional collaborations with Ain Gordon on *Punch & Judy Get Divorced* (1996) and *The First Picture Show* (1999). Gordon's next three productions, *Autobiography of a Liar* (1999), *FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COMedy* (2001), and *Private Lives of Dancers* (2002) were all performed at Danspace in New York City. Subsequent works which Gordon directed and choreographed include *Dancing Henry Five* (2004), *The Chairs* (2004), *He Who Gets Slapped* (2004), *Aristophanes' The Birds* (2006), and *The Roundheads and Pointheads* (2002-2009).

In 2012, Gordon revisited some of his older works for *The Matter/2012: Art and Archive*, which featured versions of *Mannequin*, *Chair*, and *The Matter*, all of which was part of a series celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the first Judson Dance Theater performances. The following year, Gordon was awarded a Doris Duke Artist Award.

In 2016, Gordon put on a series of performances and workshops called, *Live Archiveography*, in conjunction with an installation at the New York Public Library for Performing Arts. The installation utilized materials from Gordon's archive to reflect on his career, and culminated in a website chronicling his life and career in his own words.

## Scope and Content Note

The David Gordon/Pickup Company records date from 1957 to 2017 (bulk dates 1976-2012), and contain files which detail Gordon's career as a dancer and choreographer. The collection holds production files, photographs, press and publicity files, administrative materials, and sketchbooks. Gordon's files are arranged chronologically, providing insight into his creative process in a manner that reflects his career trajectory.

The Production Files contain a mixture of materials for specific productions, and documentation for performances, tours, appearances, events, residencies, and workshops. Files for an individual production typically hold photographs, press clippings, programs, and promotional items, while tour files generally hold agreements, correspondence, contracts, flyers, itineraries, photographs, programs, reviews, and technical specifications for venues.

The files for *United States* are the most thorough, and include research materials, design drafts for posters and artwork, detailed technical files, performance and tour files, permissions, and photographs. These materials detail the research process from the production's early conception, to performances over two years in multiple states. The *United States* Technical Files hold cue sheets, lighting hookups, tracking sheets, and technical specifications for various venues, while the Performances and Tour files contain agreements, contracts, correspondence, itineraries, additional technical specifications, and press clippings.

There is a small selection of photographs that were filed separately from the Production Files. These images are mostly headshots of Gordon and Valda Setterfield, as well as some undated group portraits.

The Press and Publicity files hold materials which were arranged separately from the production files. These files contain reviews, profiles, interviews, and pieces written by Gordon.

The Administrative files include grant applications, fellowship applications, office correspondence, meeting notes, and the Pickup Company by-laws.

There are also two undated sketchbooks which contain Gordon's designs and drawings. These materials are not attributed to any specific performance or project.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Choreographers -- United States  
Dancers.

### **Subjects**

Choreography and dance  
Postmodern dance

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings (information artifacts)  
Correspondence  
Fliers (printed matter)  
Photographs  
Programs  
Slides (photographs)

### **Names**

Gordon, Ain  
Gordon, David, 1936-  
Setterfield, Valda

## Container List

### Production Files

- b. 1 f. 1 [Unknown Performance] in Roanoke, Virginia 1957  
Contains photographs of the performance.
- b. 1 f. 2 *People* 1957  
Contains a program from a performance at Brooklyn College as part of a Modern Dance Concert.
- b. 1 f. 3 Connecticut College School of Dance 1959
- b. 1 f. 4-5 James Waring Dance Company 1960-1974
- b. 1 f. 6 *Helen's Dance* 1962
- b. 1 f. 7-8 Judson Dance Theatre 1962-1966
- b. 1 f. 9 *Random Breakfast* 1963
- b. 1 f. 10 *Walks and Digressions* 1966
- b. 1 f. 11 Yvonne Rainer Dance Company 1966
- b. 1 f. 12-13 *Life Magazine Designs* 1967-1969
  - b. 78 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 14-16 The Grand Union 1970-1976
- b. 1 f. 17-18 *Sleepwalking* 1971-1973
  - b. 2 f. 1-5 *The Matter* 1972
    - b. 80 f. 1
  - b. 2 f. 6-7 *Co-Incidents* 1972
  - b. 2 f. 8 David Gordon solo concert at The Dance Gallery 1973
  - b. 2 f. 9-10 *Spilled Milk* 1974
    - b. 78 f. 2
  - b. 2 f. 11-12 *One Act Play* 1974-1975
  - b. 2 f. 13-16 *Chair* 1974-1976
  - b. 2 f. 17-18 Tour 1975-1976
    - b. 3 f. 1-3 Contains administrative and promotional materials from performances of *Chair* and *One Act Play*.
    - b. 3 f. 4-6 *Times Four* 1975-1976
      - b. 78 f. 3
    - b. 3 f. 7 *Personal Inventory* 1976
    - b. 3 f. 8-16 Tour 1976-1977
      - b. 80 f. 2 Contains administrative documents, photographs, and publicity materials from performances of *Times Four*, *Chair*, and *Personal Inventory*.
  - b. 3 f. 17-18 *Wordsworth and the Motor and Times Four* 1977-1978
  - b. 4 f. 1-14 *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives* 1978-1979
    - b. 82 f. 1
  - b. 5 f. 1-2 Margaret Jenkins Dance Studio Workshops 1978-1979
  - b. 5 f. 3-11 *What Happened?* 1978-1981
    - b. 80 f. 7
  - b. 5 f. 12-13 *An Audience With the Pope (or This is Where I Came In)* 1979-1980
    - b. 6 f. 1-3
    - b. 6 f. 4-9 *The Matter (Plus and Minus)* 1979-1981
    - b. 6 f. 10-11 *Close-Up* 1979-1981

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 12-14 Tour 1979-1980
- b. 7 f. 1-20 Includes programs, flyers, itineraries, and contracts from performances of *Chair, An Audience With the Pope (or This is Where I Came In), What Happened?, The Matter (Plus and Minus), The Matter* and *Soft Broil*.
- b. 80 f. 3-6
- b. 81 f. 1
- b. 8 f. 1 *By Two* 1980-1981
- b. 8 f. 2 *Double Identity Part One* 1980-1981
- b. 8 f. 3 *Double Identity Part Two* 1981
- b. 8 f. 4-9 *Profile* 1981
- b. 8 f. 10-11 *Pas et Par* 1981
- b. 8 f. 12 *Counter Revolution* 1981
- b. 8 f. 13-18 Tour 1981
- b. 9 f. 1-9 Contains contracts, correspondence, programs, and flyers for performances of *Chair, Wordsworth and the Motor*, *The Matter (Plus and Minus), An Audience With the Pope (or This is Where I Came In), Double Identity Part One, Double Identity Part Two, Dorothy and Eileen, Soft Broil, Phone Call, and Counter Revolution*.
- b. 9 f. 10 *Dorothy and Eileen* 1981-1982
- b. 9 f. 11-12 *Grote Ogen* 1981-1982
- b. 9 f. 13 *TV Reel* 1982-1983
- b. 10 f. 1-10
- b. 11 f. 1 *10 Minute TV* 1982-1983
- b. 11 f. 2-6 *Trying Times* 1982-1983
- b. 11 f. 7-15 Tour 1982
- Contains contracts, agreements, correspondence, and programs from performances of *Chair, Close-Up, Soft Boil, Dorothy and Eileen, Double Identity, and T.V. Reel*.
- b. 12 f. 1-2 *Limited Partnership* 1983
- b. 12 f. 3 *Changing Horses* 1983
- b. 12 f. 4-8 *The Photographer* 1983-1984
- b. 78 f. 4
- b. 12 f. 9-15 *Framework* 1983-1984
- b. 13 f. 1-2
- b. 13 f. 3-14 Tour 1983
- b. 14 f. 1-3 Contains itineraries, contracts, and programs for performances of *Soft Broil, 10 Minute T.V., T.V. Reel, and Limited Partnership*.
- b. 14 f. 4 *Short Order* 1984
- b. 14 f. 5 *Field Study* 1984
- b. 14 f. 6-8 *A Plain Romance Explained* 1984
- b. 14 f. 9-10 *My Folks* 1984-1985
- b. 14 f. 11-14 *Field, Chair, and Mountain* 1984-1986
- b. 15-17 Tour 1984
- b. 80 f. 8 Contains contracts, programs, correspondence, and tour itineraries from performances of *Close Up, Dorothy and Eileen, What Happened?, Chair, The Photographer, and Framework*.
- b. 17 f. 5 *Piano Movers* 1985
- b. 17 f. 6 *Nine Lives* 1985
- b. 17 f. 7 *Beethoven and Boothe* 1985
- b. 17 f. 8-13 *Four Man Nine Lives* 1985-1988
- Contains additional photographs from *My Folks* and *Transparent Means for Travelling Light*.
- b. 17 f. 14-20 Tour 1985
- b. 18 f. 1-14 Contains contracts, programs, agreements, and tour itineraries from performances of *A Plain Romance Explained, My Folks, Nine Lives, and Offenbach Suite*.

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 19 f. 1 *Bernard* 1986
- b. 19 f. 2-3 *Alive from Off Center* 1986
- b. 19 f. 4-6 *My Folks* 1986
- b. 78 f. 5
- b. 19 f. 7 *The Making of the Representative for Planet Eight* 1986
- b. 19 f. 8 *Panel* 1986
- b. 19 f. 9-13 *Transparent Means for Travelling Light* 1986
- b. 78 f. 6
- b. 20 f. 1-2 *Bach and Offenbach* 1986-1987
- b. 20 f. 3-8 *Murder* 1986-1987
- b. 20 f. 9-11 *The Seasons* 1986-1988
- b. 20 f. 12-15 **Tour** 1986
  - b. 21 Contains programs, contracts, correspondence, and tour itineraries from performances of *Four Man Nine Lives*, *Offenbach Suite*, *My Folks*, and *Renard*.
  - b. 22
  - b. 78 f. 7
  - b. 81 f. 2
- b. 23 f. 1-7 *David Gordon's Made in the U.S.A. (WNET Dance in America series)* 1987-1988
- b. 24 f. 1-7
- b. 78 f. 8-11
- b. 24 f. 8-10 **Tour** 1987
  - b. 25-28 Contains programs, contracts, correspondence, and tour itineraries from performances of *Four Man Nine Lives*, *The Seasons*, *Transparent Means for Travelling Light*, and *My Folks*.
  - b. 80 f. 9-10
  - b. 82 f. 2

*United States*

- b. 28 f. 11-14 **Research** 1987-1990
- b. 29-31
- b. 31 f. 3-7 **Posters and Artwork** 1987-1990
- b. 79 f. 1-4
- b. 80 f. 11
- b. 81 f. 3-6
- b. 31 f. 8-16 **Technical Files** 1987-1990
- b. 32 f. 1-10
- b. 79 f. 5-6
- b. 32 f. 11-27 **Performances and Tour** 1987-1990
- b. 33-46
- b. 46 f. 3-9 **Permissions** 1988-1989
- b. 46 f. 10-13 **Photographs** 1988-1990
- b. 47 f. 1-3
- b. 82 f. 3
- b. 47 f. 4-5 *Mates* 1988
- b. 47 f. 6 *My Folks* 1989
- b. 47 f. 7 *Reynard* 1989
- b. 47 f. 8-15 *The Mysteries and What's so Funny* 1989-1993
- b. 48-51
- b. 80 f. 12-15
- b. 82 f. 4
- b. 52 f. 1 *La Fenice* 1990-1991
- b. 52 f. 2-15 **Performances** 1990-1991
  - Punch and Judy Get Divorced*
  - Electronic records are currently unavailable.
- b. 53-55 **1991-1996**
- b. 55 f. 6 **White Oak Project** 1992

Production Files (cont.)

*The Family Business*

Electronic records are currently unavailable.

b. 55 f. 7-10 1993-1995

b. 56 f. 1-10

b. 57 f. 1-4

b. 80 f. 16

b. 81 f. 7

b. 57 f. 4 Works in Progress 1994

b. 57 f. 5-7 *Shlemiel the First* 1994-1997

b. 58-60

*Firebugs*

Electronic records are currently unavailable.

b. 60 f. 6-11 1994-1995

b. 61 f. 1-5

b. 61 f. 6-10 *Who's Anne First? or The First Picture Show or Silent Movie* 1996-1999

b. 62 f. 1-8

b. 63 f. 1-6

b. 63 f. 7-9 *Illustrated Radio Show* 1998

b. 64 f. 1-7 *Some-Kind-Of-A-Wind-In-The-Willows* 1998-2000

b. 64 f. 8-10 *Autobiography of a Liar* 1999

b. 65 f. 1-3

b. 65 f. 4-11 *Past/Forward* 1999-2001

b. 80 f. 17

b. 65 f. 12 *Close Up* 2001

Contains only photographs.

b. 66 f. 1-4 *FAMILY\$DEATH@ART.COMedy* 2001

b. 66 f. 5-7 *The Roundheads and the Pointheads* 2002

b. 79 f. 7

b. 66 f. 8 Performances 2002

Contains programs and flyers from 2002 performances at P.S.122, Danspace Project, Jacob's Pillow, the Kitchen, and the George Street Playhouse.

b. 66 f. 9-11 *Private Lives of Dancers* 2002-2003

b. 67 f. 1-6

b. 67 f. 7-8 *The Chairs* 2003-2004

b. 68 f. 1-10

b. 69 f. 1-2

b. 79 f. 8

b. 69 f. 3-5 *Couples* 2004

b. 69 f. 6-10 *Dancing Henry Five* 2004-2011

b. 70 f. 1-5

b. 70 f. 6-8 *Aristophanes' The Birds* 2005-2006

b. 70 f. 9 The Bessies 2006

b. 70 f. 10-12 *Uncivil Wars* 2006-2009

b. 71 f. 1-8

b. 72 f. 1-8

b. 80 f. 18

b. 72 f. 9 *Trying Times (Remembered)* 2007-2008

b. 73 f. 1-2

b. 82 f. 5

b. 73 f. 3-5 *Shlemiel the First* 2008-2011

b. 82 f. 6

b. 73 f. 6-7 *CHIME Across Borders* 2010-2012

b. 73 f. 8-11 *Beginning of the End of the...* 2012



Production Files (cont.)

- b. 73 f. 12-13 *The Matter/2012: Art and Archive* 2012
  - b. 73 f. 14 *Political Shenanigans* 2014
  - b. 74 f. 1-4
  - b. 74 f. 5-8 *Archiveography* 2016-2017
  - b. 74 f. 9-15 Photographs 1965-1999
  - b. 79 f. 9-10
  - b. 80 f. 19
- b. 74 f. 16-17 Press and Publicity 1975-2008
  - b. 75-77
  - b. 81 f. 8

Administrative

Electronic records are currently unavailable.

- b. 77 f. 3-19 1978-1997
- b. 82 f. 7-8 Sketchbooks 1970s-1980s